



BACKCOUNTRY BASICS



Welcome to Your Trip-Planning Guide

More than 90% of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks is “backcountry,” beyond civilization and accessible only by trail. Our goal in managing this wilderness is to provide for your enjoyment without significantly impairing resources, the natural processes that shape them, or the quality of experience distinctive to them. The guidelines detailed here are to help the parks — and you — to meet that goal.

We are visitors in the wilderness. What we bring to it and how we behave affects not only our experience, but that of others. When we enjoy its freedom, beauty and solitude, we also accept responsibility — protecting these wild landscapes must become a personal ethic.

Some mark is left in the wilderness each time we visit. Please, be keenly aware of the immense cumulative effect of these marks.

The truest challenge of wilderness lies in passing it on unimpaired.

Within these pages is information on permits, trails, regulations and guidelines, safety, books and maps, and a touch of philosophy. It is difficult to distill the essence of a backcountry visit into eight pages of print, so this presents only the basics. Your planning and research will help to ensure that your experience is unforgettable — in a good way.

Contents	
Bears:	
Storing food is required	6
Hanging food: Not the best option.....	7
Food storage box locations	7
Books and maps	8
Camping regulations: Leave no trace!	4
Fishing regulations	5
Food drops	5
Permits: They’re required.....	2
Forest Service permits	2
Safety: You’re on your own.....	1
Stock use.....	5
Pack stations	5
Trails: 700+ miles to choose from	3



Park Information

- Visitor, Road, and Weather Information: (559)565-3341
- Wilderness Office: (559)565-3766 or 3761
- Emergency within parks: 911
- Park website: www.nps.gov/seki
- Wilderness websites: www.sierranewadawild.gov and www.wilderness.net
- Bear and food storage website: www.sierrawildbear.gov
- Backcountry sanitation: www.nps.gov/public_health/

[inter/backcountry/bc.htm](http://www.nps.gov/seki/inter/backcountry/bc.htm)

- Fire Information: www.nps.gov/seki
- *The Visitor Guide*, the free park newspaper, has details on campgrounds, lodging, food, showers, and laundry. To receive this newspaper by mail before your trip, call (559)565-3341 or write to Visitor Information, Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks, 47050 Generals Highway, Three Rivers, CA 93271.

Your Responsibility

Entering the wilderness areas of Sequoia and Kings Canyon is not just another walk in the park. When you travel in the backcountry, you are accepting the responsibility that comes with it. There are inherent risks associated with backcountry travel.

Wilderness visitors should be prepared to accept those risks and the dangers associated with them. Know what to expect before you arrive at the trailhead. Check with rangers when you pick up your permit for any local hazards such as dangerous water crossings or natural fires. Rangers can assist in planning a safe and enjoyable trip. When in doubt, ask questions and be cautious. Never take

unnecessary risks. Backcountry travelers need to be responsible for their own welfare and safety. Help can be scarce in the wilderness. If you become sick or injured, it may be several days before another party encounters you.

Don't rely on a cellular phone; cellular coverage in the backcountry is spotty at best. If you do reach someone, difficult weather and terrain may slow or prohibit a quick rescue. Carry extra food, clothing, and equipment. Proper planning, a clear head, and your will to survive may be the only things that save your life.

Each year, rescuers risk their lives due to weather, terrain, and dangerous helicopter flights en route to save

others. Don't let your carelessness, poor judgment, or lack of planning cost others their lives.

Check weather forecasts and trail conditions when planning what equipment and clothing to take. Always be prepared for severe weather by carrying warm clothing and raingear. Take — and know how to use — a topographic map of the areas you plan to visit.

Let someone at home know where you are going and when you expect to return. Pack first aid supplies and know how to use them. Poison oak, rattlesnakes, and ticks are most common at lower elevations, but may occur at higher altitudes. Your own safety is your responsibility.

Wilderness Safety

Lost or injured

Leave detailed trip plans with someone who will notify the park 24-hour number if you do not return as planned: (559) 565-3341. If you get lost, stay put. Try to stay in a clearing or large rocky outcropping; lay out a colorful tarp or build a small smoky fire in a safe area.

High water

Don't underestimate the power of swift water — it can be deadly. Look for natural bridges such as logs or rocks to cross, but be careful — they can be extremely slippery. If none are available, wade the creek where it is wide and shallow. Do not cross above rapids or a river gorge in case you fall. Unbuckle the waist strap on your pack, and use a long stick as a third leg for stability. It is safer to wear shoes while crossing streams. If in a group, cross together, holding onto each other. Don't tie yourself into ropes. Cross in early morning when water level is lowest.

Lightning

Watch for approaching storms and go to a safe area before they arrive. During lightning storms, avoid mountain tops, ridges, open areas, lone trees, shallow caves, and the base or edge of cliffs. Forested areas away from the tallest trees are safer.

If you are in a treeless area and cannot get to a safer place, put insulating material (poncho or foam pad) on a small rock and sit on it. Only your buttocks and feet should touch the material. Clasp your hands around your knees. Use this method only if there are no alternatives.

On Mt. Whitney: Do not seek shelter in the Mt. Whitney Hut. The metal roof attracts lightning which can be conducted to individuals inside. Retreat from the summit before storms arrive and leave plenty of time to get off the mountain.

Natural fire

In this fire-dependent ecosystem, fire creates a natural mosaic of plant communities. Lightning fires are permitted to do their ecological work in large portions of these parks. You may have an opportunity to see or travel through a burning or recently burned area.

Trail closures may be necessary for public safety. In other cases trails may remain open but use extreme caution and remain alert for possible hazards: active fire, dense smoke, rolling rocks and logs, and falling trees or limbs. Watch for and heed trail closures or warning signs.

Altitude illness

Altitude illness can strike anyone — young or old, fit

or unfit. See page 6 for details on altitude illness.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia — subnormal body temperature — can lead to mental and physical collapse and death. Caused by combinations of cold, wetness, and wind, it is aggravated by exhaustion. Most cases develop in air temperatures between 30° and 50° F, but can happen during any season. Stay dry; wet clothes can lose up to 90 percent of their insulating value. Wool and synthetics provide better insulation when wet than cotton and down.

Signs of hypothermia are uncontrollable shivering; vague, slow, slurred speech; memory lapses and incoherence; stumbling; drowsiness; and exhaustion. The victim may deny any problem so believe the signs, not the victim. Even mild hypothermia demands immediate treatment.

Shelter the victim from wind and rain; strip off all wet clothes; give warm drinks; get them into warm clothes and a sleeping bag; and keep them awake.

Black bears

To protect yourself from injury due to encounters with black bears, it is required that you properly store your food at all times. See page 7 for food storage options.